

# An Interview with Colleen West



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Department of Dance, World Dance, 1986–2015

Interviewed February 17, 2015

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I currently teach, and have taught for many years, Advanced Tap, which I really love. I also work with the International Folk Dance Ensemble. I'm taking them on summer tour this year to Croatia and Spain. I've worked with them the last two years while one of our faculty members has been working on her MFA, so I've taught different folk dance teams throughout the year. I also teach dancers how to *teach* dance: I teach a methodology class in world dance. I also teach world dance choreography for world dance minors who would like to learn how to choreograph.

Other courses I've taught: intermediate tap and beginning tap; and years before, I taught clogging. I started teaching as a junior when I was a student here. I was with the Ballroom Dance Company then, as well as the Folk Dance Company, so I've taught a ballroom class. I'd have to get a list of the classes I've taught; there are a lot. I also teach a class in exercise science for students who want to be physical educators, and I teach them how to teach aerobics.

I'm teaching a Ukrainian ethnic dance class right now, and there's a lot of history attached to that. In my master's degree, I studied Ukrainian dance because I'm half Ukrainian; my mother's Ukrainian, so I have a passion for that culture. I've been to Ukraine several times and have studied Ukrainian dance and music and costumes. So I have a class on Ukrainian dance where I teach about several regions in Ukraine. At the beginning of each class for the first five or ten minutes—I call it "cultural tidbits"—we talk about something that happens in the Ukrainian culture that impacts the dance somehow. The students really get to know the Ukrainian culture in that class.

I go into every class and say, "Oh my gosh, this is my favorite class!"

I absolutely love to teach and interact with the students at BYU. It's been a passion my whole life and such a blessing and gift that I've been able to do something that I love. I love the Folk Dance program and what it has to offer and the experiences that it provides for the students, but I also love to tap. That's what I started in. My mother put me in tap dance when I was little, so I've tapped all my life.

When I was hired in the world dance area, I asked the department chair at that time, "Can I still teach tap?" And she let me teach tap.

I also taught the aerobic dance classes and was the coordinator of that. I've taught a lot of different things over the years.

As I said, I was a dance major and started teaching as an undergraduate. Back in those days, BYU had a master's program in dance, so I continued on to get my master's degree and was a graduate teacher. As soon as I graduated (I think I graduated in the fall) I was hired winter semester as adjunct faculty. Then I was hired as full-time faculty, so I've never left BYU. I've always come back to school every fall, and I've loved every minute of it.

## Faculty Mentors

A person who's impacted my life the most would be Mary Bee Jensen, the founder and director of the Folk Dancers. She took me under her wing and taught me so much through her example.

There were classes we taught together, or she'd come into a class and put me in positions where she would say, "All right, Colleen is going to talk to you a little bit about the Folk Dance program."

She'd put me on the spot where I'd have to automatically talk off the top of my head in front of students so I could learn to be better at public speaking. She would give me teaching tips all the time, and she still mentors me today; I met with her last Wednesday. She's going to be ninety-eight years old in two months.

I meet with her quite often, and she'll excitedly say, "Okay, we want to do this!"

She's an awesome lady, and, boy, if I could have her health, I'd want to live until I was ninety-eight also. She's had a major impact in my life and in training me.

Phyllis Jacobson did as well. She was the department chair when I was a student. She was the one who started the *Hooked on Aerobics* program, and I was one of her students underneath that program. So I taught aerobic dance, and we went out and did certification clinics. We also did the *Hooked on Aerobics* television show, and I was one of the dancers on that. So she had an impact in my life as far as physical fitness and teaching.

They're both such great examples. You know, as a student you sit back and watch the faculty and learn from how they conduct themselves and how they mentor you.

When I became full-time faculty, I felt like Suzanne Davis also put me under her wing and taught me the trades of being a full-time faculty member. She'd take me to conferences and show me what happens at a conference, what workshops you should go to, how you become an officer and sit on the board, and then how to present workshops. She taught me a lot about attending workshops and networking with people.

I actually took her position as the world dance administrator, so I felt like she trained me for several years to prepare me for that position in becoming an administrator. It's a love-hate relationship being an administrator. There are parts of it I love, and then there are parts where I sit at my desk and think, *I never wanted a job sitting at a desk all day in front of a computer. I'm a dancer. I'm a teacher. I'm a choreographer.*

It works out okay though, because you spend a couple hours on your computer and then you're in the dance studio, which calms me down and I think, *Okay, I can do this and I love this and I'm going to stay.* Then you come back and you've got all the administrative stuff that sometimes is fun, but sometimes is really challenging too.

Those are my main teachers and mentors over the years. There's of course a lot of people, but those would be the main ones.

As I said, Phyllis Jacobson was the department chair. Marilyn Barrett is the current dance department chair, and she's been a real advocate and a real support system as far as following you in your passions and your dreams and directing you as a faculty member. She's been very good at that, and I've enjoyed her as an administrator.

## **The Richard's Building**

The Richard's building is my second home. I call it my cave. There are many times when I think, *Why don't I just have a bed here?* I'm here early in the morning, and I leave late at night—I live in Draper, Utah, so I commute, and that takes time. I sleep for a few hours, and then I'm back the next day. It was like that as a student also. For dance, you're here during the day doing classes, but in the evenings is when you have your rehearsals or your performances. So I have late nights a lot, and then on weekends there's performances or we're traveling somewhere to perform with a Folk Dance Ensemble.

As a student, I danced with the Ballroom Dance Company. Then I also went to the International Folk Dance Ensemble and danced with them for years, and traveled all around the world with Mary Bee in her last years at BYU. I've continued to travel with the Folk Dancers, going with them on several of their tours locally, nationally, and internationally. It's been a great experience.

## **Years as a Student**

When I was a student, I was so passionate about dance I couldn't get enough. It's interesting, because I didn't want to go to university after high school. I was done with school, but my mother sort of forced me.

She said, "That's what a lot of the Mormon kids are doing; they're going to BYU and so are you."

So she brought me down from Calgary, Canada. I remember clearly the day that my family dropped me off at the old Deseret Towers, and then they left in our camper and went to Disneyland. I remember thinking, *I don't know one person in America.* I was terrified. That was my first day at BYU.

Now, I've never left. I ended up having a career here, which I never thought would happen. When I first came to BYU, I didn't know what I wanted to do; I didn't even want to go to university. I remember one day walking home from class thinking, *I've got to figure out my life. I've got to figure out what I want to major in.* I was taking random classes to try and figure that out.

I thought I would go into physical education, and I remember having a very clear thought: *You know, you should go into dance.* I had danced growing up, but I never dreamed of a career in dance. I changed my classes and I've never looked back.

The experiences and opportunities at BYU are phenomenal as far as having opportunities to perform, which I love to do. Then as a student, I had opportunities to teach. I didn't consider getting a master's degree, and so I took more dance classes than I was required to as a dance major because I didn't know what I would

do with my dance degree—would I go dance professionally, or would I open a studio? I wanted to be able to do a little bit of everything, so I took a lot of dance classes.

Then one of my really good friends in the master's program said, "You should do this. It's really good." I thought, *I think I will*. So I continued on.

I love to teach and love to travel, and I love learning about other cultures and their dance and their traditions and their music. I don't know what it is, but I never get tired of it. It's a fascinating field of study for me. I had wonderful experiences traveling with the Folk Dance program throughout the world.

I've been to about twenty-eight countries since I was a student. I don't think I really have a favorite place; like I said, I love all cultures. I think one of the places that does stand out to me, of course, is Ukraine. Going to Istanbul was also an amazing experience, because that country is so rich in culture. It's unbelievable. You're immersed in culture.

When I go to places, I love to stay with families if I know someone. I'd rather stay with a family than in a hotel, because then you're eating their food, you're a part of their daily life, and you get to experience the real culture. I've had amazing experiences as a student with travel and performing.

## **Years as Faculty**

I started at BYU as an adjunct faculty member. I think it was winter 1985 or 1986. I started as a full-time in 1992 or 1993. So I've worked here many years. The full-time faculty slot was open for several years, so I don't know who I replaced.

I absolutely love and support BYU. It's an amazing university to work at. My husband comes to a lot of performances and rehearsals and stuff like that, and I remember one time when he came, a student was praying before rehearsal. They prayed for me that I would be able to be calm and remember what I had choreographed and that the students would listen and be able to retain the choreography, and it went on and on.

My husband and I were talking about that when we were driving home that evening. He said, "No one ever prays for me at my job." He works in downtown Salt Lake City. "Do you realize what a great place you work at?"

I remember saying, "I do, and I need to appreciate that."

We need to appreciate that we get to talk about the gospel and intertwine the gospel with dance, and that we can pray before class and we can have spiritual thoughts, and how powerful that is. Those moments are amazing to have in the dance class.

So why did I come to BYU? I've always been here. Maybe why did I stay? I love that part—sharing the gospel. You can share the gospel through dance so clearly, because you don't have to speak the same language.

## **Contemporary Faculty Members**

I work with Jeanette Geslison, Ed Austin, and Amy Jex. Those are the full-time people, and then there's about eleven adjunct faculty. There's a family of people in the world dance here, and of course I work with other people in the Dance Department. I have meetings with faculty from ballet and contemporary and ballroom, and we see each other at different performances. I've worked with all of them—everybody!—throughout all the years. I've had some kind of working relationship with everybody in the dance department.

I work with Jeanette Geslison and Amy Jex a lot. I'm currently training Amy to take my position as I retire, and Jeanette is currently the artistic director for the International Folk Dance Ensemble, I'm in contact with them on a daily basis trying to keep the world dance area running as smoothly as possible.

I mentioned the administrators I worked with as far as department chairs. Sara Lee Gibb was also a department chair that I worked under. There was also Lee Wakefield, department chair for about ten years, so I worked with him a lot. Now we have Marilyn Barrett, and all of them have been outstanding people.

## Choreographing

I choreograph a lot; that's one thing besides teaching I have a passion for. I love to choreograph, and it's a skill that I've worked on my entire career. When someone asks me to choreograph something, I'll excitedly say, "Oh, I'll do it!" I'm all over it.

In fact, I'm doing three pieces this semester. I'm choreographing a tap piece for the Contemporary Dance Theater's summer tour. They're headed to Hungary and Austria. I'm also choreographing a tap number for the Folk Dancers for their summer tour, and a Charleston.

I usually choreograph two or three pieces a semester, which is a lot. It's not something that takes two or three hours. It takes a lot of hours, but it's not painful, because I love it. I'll find a piece of music and the only thing I struggle with is that I get so many ideas, I don't know which one to pick. I'll think, *Just pick something! We have to get this done.*

I've had some great opportunities to perform and choreograph for World of Dance, which we now call eviDANCE, and Homecoming Spectacular. I've choreographed several pieces for them. I always have some piece in "Christmas Around the World" for Folk Dancers. I've done Polish or Romanian; I've choreographed a Ukrainian Hopak, which is the signature piece, and Ed Austin helped me on that.

Something that was really a highlight was last year when I was in Europe with the Folk Dancers, and I got a phone call from Marilyn Barrett, the department chair. She said there was a request for the Folk Dancers to perform at the BYU presidential inauguration luncheon. We discussed what that would be, and talked about some different pieces. I ended up choreographing a brand-new piece from the Ukrainian Hutsul area, which is the southwestern part of Ukraine. We found and cut some music, and we have beautiful costumes that were embroidered in Ukraine from that area. We performed in September for the inauguration luncheon for Kevin J. Worthen in the Wilkinson Center. It was a highlight to perform for the group of people who were there. Many of the Quorum of the Twelve were there, and it was a highlight for the students to have that opportunity and for them to be requested to perform at the luncheon. It was also an opportunity for me to really put those skills to the test, because you want it to be just right for a performance like that.

Last summer I choreographed a western line and swing dance, and I had an adjunct faculty member, Lyndsey Wulfenstein, help me with it. When the students come out in their jeans and their cowboy shirts and cowboy boots, the European audiences love that, because they attach that western look with Americans. That was a fun piece to choreograph, and to see the audience react to something you choreographed and see that they love it.

## Methods of Teaching

I've created brand new curriculum for many courses. I created all the curriculum for the tap courses, and I actually wrote a book to go with it titled *Tap Dance Fundamentals in Higher Education*. You create learning outcomes and assessments and then tweak it all to try and make it better every semester; and then there's mentoring your teachers and your student teachers who are teaching those courses, and making sure they're teaching the correct curriculum. I also taught a course in dance and health that I created the curriculum for, and I created all new curriculum for the teaching techniques class.

I've attended many conferences over the years. I was counting it the other day, and I've been to about thirty-four conferences, both national and international. Through the networking, you meet many people who are also in your field.

When I'm creating new curriculum, I like to send emails to the people I've met and say, "Hey, I'm creating a new course," and then I pick their brains. I ask them a lot of questions, like "What would you do?" I take input from all those people.

I also go online and look at other universities, and if they have a course similar to the one I'm creating I ask, "What do they do in their course?"

So I'm not sitting there trying to do it off the top of my head, but really trying to do some qualitative research to create a curriculum that is satisfactory to the students.

Then every semester as I'm teaching, I'll write down, "Don't do that again, that didn't work. Next semester, do this instead."

Then every time I look at my course outline, I can try to tweak it and refine it so that it's constantly improving and it's updated.

I try to teach by example. I just taught the teaching class last semester, where I teach students how to teach dance, and I share my learning experiences throughout the years.

As I teach I'll say, "I wasn't like this twenty years ago. This teaching has evolved, and that's what I love about teaching: you continue to learn. You're never a perfect teacher. There's always something that you can learn and do better."

I share my experiences with them of things that didn't work, and the lesson I learned from that. I find that the students relate to it, because then they're not intimidated, and don't think, *Uh, I don't teach as well as you.*

I'll say, "No, you should have seen me when I was at your age teaching; I was trying to learn the same things."

So I share experiences with them—funny ones and other things where I think, *That's a mistake I made and I will not do that again, I will do it this way.* I can see them figuring out that information and thinking, *Oh, that's a good idea to not do it that way.*

I find it really helps them in their teaching. They learn to be humble and say, "I've had fifty things not work, and this is what I did to make them work."

Then they also know that you'll continue to learn as you teach. You learn from your mistakes; you don't learn from doing it perfectly every time. I teach them to allow that to happen in the classroom as well—to have that atmosphere where students feel like they can take risks and make mistakes so that they can learn. That way they're not such perfectionists that they'll be upset when they make a mistake.

We talk about "Well, what happened here? What would you do differently if you had another chance to do this?"

I try to create an atmosphere like that in my methods of teaching. I want students to be able to come up to me and ask me questions and not be intimidated by me. I also want them to know that I love what I teach, and I think when you show that as a teacher, then the students love it too.

I don't come in class and say, "Ugh, I don't even want to be here."

I'm always excited. "Ahh! I love class! Okay, let's go!"

## Technology

I also use technology in the classroom, which has been a real positive thing in dance. It makes things a lot easier. In teaching, for instance, I'll videotape the student teaching the class, and then I'll sit with the student in my office and we'll watch it together, and I can give them feedback instantly.

I remember one student had her hands gripped in front of her the whole time she was teaching.

She said, "I didn't even know I was standing like that. I was so nervous."

It's a great way for them to get that feedback—having a video, which speaks a thousand words instead of just writing notes on a piece of paper.

Before, it used to be a big old video camera. Then it was flip videos where you could just email it to students right away when I'd videotape them dancing. I loved that. Now it's YouTube, and you just send them the link. In my tap class today, I taught a part of a combination, and at the end of class, the students got their phones out and I danced it slowly and counted it for them. Then they can just video it on their cell phones and go home and practice. That's fantastic.

Some students like me to write the dance out. I have almost all my tap choreographies—everything I've choreographed—and I'll copy it for them. I can read it, and I teach them how to read it. But a lot of students decide, *I'm not going to try and do this*, and they would rather have the dance choreography on video. There are also some students who want video, plus they want it written out; then if they can't see what I'm doing, they can always read what I'm doing. So I give them both. I give them notes and the dances that I teach in the tap classes; I've written it out in the book that I use in class.

It's in the book I created because students are always asking for it written out, and it has all the dances written in there. There are some students that want to read it and analyze it.

I wrote a folk dance book too, to use in the folk dance classes. It has all the dances written out that we did in the class and cultural information on costumes. We don't use it as much because technology has changed it, and it's really much easier to watch a dance on video and learn it than to decipher it from notes. You really could figure out the dance from the notes, but it's a lot faster to learn it with a video. This book is called *Recreational Folk Dance*, and there's a CD of music that goes with it so the students have the music to the dances in the book—in folk dance you don't just pick a song off of iTunes, you have to use the correct music from the correct country, so we were able to get some music rights for that. Those two books took a lot of time, but they were worth it.

I use that technology in every single class. When I first started teaching the choreography class, I used to try to have some students who worked on the video, copying videos: "Copy this dance, and this, so I can show them in class."

Now you can go to YouTube and have amazing things to show the students. That's a very positive thing in dance.

Of course there's some other tools in technology. There's one called Coach's Eye, where you can videotape a student and then you can give corrections; you can even write the corrections right on the video and sit with the students and show them that their alignment is off or whatever. There are so many programs you can use, it's almost overwhelming. But it helps the students be better dancers.

### **Changes in the Dance Department**

So much has changed since I was a student at BYU in the early eighties. I guess that's a good thing. There are people who don't like change, and they have a hard time with it; you will get some faculty that dig their heels in, and say, "We've always done it this way and it's worked."

I think what's great about BYU is that you have to change to keep up with what's going on in the real world in your profession, while still incorporating the gospel into it. If we were still teaching the way we were in the early 1980s, it would be embarrassing. You've got to keep up with the times, and you've got to be able to change. Change is hard sometimes, and so is learning new curriculum and learning new technology. It all takes time, and you have to carve that time out of your daily schedule. Everything's changed. What we taught twenty years ago, even what we taught five years ago, we've updated.

We've revised our dance major several times, and have moved classes around on the map sheet to help better service the students.

We also have amazing physical facilities now, and a lot of support and resources from the department, college, and university. For instance, we have a person whose full-time job is to help videotape our classes and performance. You talk to other departments and they'll say, "You have what? You have a full-time person that does this?"

Our dance floors are beautiful. The university is always updating the sound systems for our music. I think in some regards we're quite spoiled in the resources and facilities we have.

I've been able to travel so much by applying for grants. Writing grants is not fun, it's probably my least favorite thing to do, but because of that, I've received a lot of money over the years to present at international conferences. Those experiences have refined me as a faculty member through networking and seeing what other people are doing out in the real world in dance. That's been a real positive thing. A lot of people I've known through the years at other universities don't get to travel as much because they don't have the money to do it. They could have traveled if they'd used their personal funds, but I've been able to access some of those monies that are available to faculty. We're so blessed that way, and that's been a change over the years—having more money to be able to do things, or having money to create a piece or get costumes.

The Folk Dance costumes are the bloodline. Our costume warehouse is huge. There are seven pieces to one costume for the girls, so the costumes are very expensive.

The costumes have changed over the years. When I first was dancing with Folk Dancers, we had very basic costumes, and people in the community were making simple costumes. Now we try to purchase most of our costumes right from the country. Then it's the real thing, and it was hand embroidered by little grandmas or whatever. We have beautiful, beautiful costumes, and that's been a nice change in the organization.

## **World Dance**

Our world dance program is very different—it was wonderful when Mary Bee was the director of it, but that was her era, and when the next person takes it in the next era, you get new ideas and a new way to work with the students and perform.

I think our dancers now are better technically on our teams because we have more classes in our world dance area to prepare them. In the early eighties, we had a beginning folk dance class or an intermediate, and now they can take Ukrainian, Spanish, Indian, Chinese, Hungarian, Irish and Polynesian. They can take a class and learn about that country the whole semester. We have incredible foot-work classes, like the Irish classes which teach Irish Hard Shoe and Soft Shoe. There's the clogging classes; we have amazing faculty in the clogging program and the tap classes. The methodology class has been taught for many years, but now we have a new choreographic class in world dance. We overall have more course offerings for the students to help train them.

And now a student can be a world dance minor. We've really refined that in about the last year. We get a lot of students that dance in our program who we want to take some of these other classes to help build their technique. They find that they've taken maybe five or six classes, and then they just take a couple more, and they could have a minor. So we have a large minor. I'm the world dance minor advisor, and we have about forty-two students right now that are minors, which is pretty good.

We've had the minor for years, but I think we've really pushed it in the last ten or fifteen years. Last year, we took the minor and, as a world dance faculty, we met to tweak it and to help it better serve the students.

We'll say, "Well, let's take out this class and add this class and..."

You're always trying to figure out a way that would better facilitate the students to be better prepared as world dance minors, so they can go out in the community and teach if they want to.

## **Advances in the field**

We have our Mountain Strings bluegrass band, who play a lot more live music for us in our folk dance concerts; that's nice, to have live music. When we travel to Europe to go to a Folk Dance Festival, we are only allowed to bring live music; you can't bring taped music. So we create all of our dances, and we have a group of students that learn the music. Then we dance to their live music at the festivals, and that's always a great experience. They're so talented, these students who can play the instruments, and they're a part of our performing program, our top group that performs.

## **Focus of Research**

I have spent a lot of time researching Ukrainian dance. I've presented several papers at conferences on different parts of Ukrainian dance, and also tap dance. I've taught hundreds of workshops throughout the United States, and in international countries like in Slovenia and Italy, and several more. So I would say Ukrainian dance is my focus of research. Also tap, and I've written papers on the choreographic process in world dance. I've enjoyed learning about that. Also teaching methods; in fact, I'm going with some faculty members to St. Petersburg in another month to talk about how to teach Ukrainian dance.

"How do you approach it, and what are the teaching methods of that? How do you teach the styling and the culture and all of that?"

As for my creative work, like I said, I'll bet I've choreographed a hundred pieces. I love to choreograph, and I'm always honored to choreograph. It's not only a great experience for me, but I know it's a fun experience for the students. The tap room isn't very big; it can hold a maximum of twenty-five students, and I will always take as many students as I can when I'm going to do a tap piece. I try to take twenty-four or twenty-five to give as many students an opportunity to learn a piece of choreography and perform it on these big concerts. It's great.

## **Mentoring Students**

I've mentored thousands of students. Not last year, but the year before, I had the opportunity to mentor a dance student because she was speaking at our convocation. That was a whole process of spending the



whole summer with her, looking at her paper and giving her ideas, and then coming to an end product that you know the student's really proud of. I've had a lot of opportunities to mentor, and probably the main mentoring that I do is not just with some of the speeches that students give, but with the teaching.

We have undergraduate students that teach a lot of our 100-level classes, and we don't just say, "Here's a class to teach."

Instead, I'm teaching them how to teach, and mentoring them. I go in and watch their class and write out feedback for them. They'll come and TA with me so they can see the process of teaching and they can learn the curriculum. I've done that with thousands of students.

I've helped students with ORCA grants, where they've traveled all over. I write letters of recommendation, which I just really don't like to do. (In fact, I've got one to do right now.) But I do a lot of those for students as they're trying to get into graduate schools.

I like to mentor students because I feel like so many people gave so much of their precious time to teach me and mentor me over the years that it's my turn to give back. And I do. If a student asks for help in anything, I will always bend over backwards to help them. It's like mentoring the next generation that's coming up, and sharing things that you've learned with them to help them become better at what they want to do.

## Retirement

I have submitted my paperwork to retire August 31, 2015, and this was a tough decision, because I truly do love what I'm able to do—travel with the students and teach and choreograph—and so I've been thinking for a couple years about retiring.

So I've decided to retire. Why do I want to do that? I want to do other things. I want to be able to still be young enough that I can do other things. I have a long bucket list, and I'm in a position where I no longer need to work full-time along with my husband to provide financial needs. My kids are raised and have their kids, so there's not that need where if I don't work we don't have enough food to eat. I still will work part-time somewhere. I would like to come back and work here part-time, but I have to quit for six months because of the law—and that just drives me crazy. So I will come back and just teach a couple of the classes that I've taught for years. I also need to train people for things like the choreographic class and show them what I've done in that class.

Things I want to do: I'm going to learn how to play the violin, I'm going to learn how to quilt, and I'm going to travel like crazy. I might even get another degree; I've always wanted to get a PhD. So I may.

There are days where I'll think, *Ugh, I can't wait to retire*—when I have long meetings or whatever. Then there are days like today when I think, *What are you doing? You are going to have withdrawals*. I am. I don't know anything different. I've done this since I was a student, and it's been a part of my life for so long. My entire family's life. My kids, when they were little, went to every rehearsal and performance with me because I didn't want to leave them with babysitters in the evening. With my husband, I think, *How many costumes has he packed over the years?* He's been great; it's been a family event.

I can't believe I'm retiring. I was walking down the hall and a student said, "I just found out you are retiring. You can't retire! How will we function?"

I said, "You'll be fine. You'll be fine."

I have really mixed emotions. I have days where I think, *I'm really glad, I can't wait until I have some time to do some other things*. Then there are days where I think, *You have made the wrong decision*.

But the paper is signed and there's no turning back. I was told, "You can't change your mind after this."

## Future of the Dance Department

I've met and worked with some great people over the years. I've had great experiences. I've loved it. I never get tired of watching dance either. I know sometimes we'll be at a concert and my husband's snoring and I think, *Are you kidding me?* I never get tired of watching dance or being a part of that process of getting a concert ready.

When I think about where today's faculty and students are focusing their efforts and energies, I think about how BYU now wants faculty to have MFAs, and most of the faculty have MAs; some of them are

starting to get their MFAs. That's changed, and if you want to be considered hired full-time here, you have to have an MFA or a PhD.

So I'm really trying to encourage students who are dance students, saying, "If you think you want to possibly teach at BYU in the future, or even at a university, don't go the MA way, go the MFA way. You can do an MA, but you'd have to get a PhD to work at BYU."

So in the future, it will be important to change that focus of graduate work so we have a good hiring pool to draw from. That change has happened over the last five or six years, and it's affected us, because a lot of people have MAs. They may be qualified to teach, but they don't have the right degree.

An MA is considered more of a research degree, where an MFA is more choreographing. In the world dance area it's hard, because MFAs especially focus on contemporary or modern dance and ballet. Those don't fit our needs. Jeannette Geslison, who's working on her MFA right now, found a university that will allow her to do some of her coursework in world dance, because that's what we need.

So as I talk to students, maybe future faculty, I say, "This is what you need to take to prepare yourself to take over the dance department as the next generation."

It will be totally different in ten years from now. We'll probably have different facilities or have new facilities, and the touring program will change. Things are constantly evolving. As you're connected with the Church and also new administration, what they want to see happen will change.

## Motivation

I was looking at these quotes on my wall today, and I thought, *Oh, how do we anchor our students in the gospel?*

I put those up there to just remind me to ask, "Am I doing that in my class? Am I anchoring the students in the gospel? With my choices and the way I conduct myself as a faculty member, am I setting a good example for my students? Am I, in some ways, encouraging their testimony?"

This one I love: "All faculty are expected to be role models for a life that combines the quest for intellectual rigor with spiritual values and personal integrity."

Boom. That's it. I like that because I think that's what we need to be. We need to be great examples to our students.

Last summer when we were in Europe, I told the students, "You've prepared mentally and physically to learn these dances and to be in shape to perform these dances, and you also need to prepare yourself spiritually. Before you go on stage, I hope that you would pray to your Heavenly Father to help you to share the gospel through dance."

People in the audience really can feel the spirit of Christ through dance. There are many times when the students come off stage, and people will come up to me and say, "There's something different about your dancers, and it's not that they're fabulous professional dancers, but there's something about them that is unique on stage."

I know what they're seeing and they're feeling: you really can share the gospel through dance.

We have a prayer before every performance that we will be able to allow that spirit to radiate through our bodies, through the dance, and that people in the audience will feel something when they see us. Because that's so powerful, I know that's why the Church supports us in traveling all over the world. It's very expensive to send forty-five of us; it's very expensive to fly us over to all these places. But the good that we do in hopefully setting a positive example for the Mormon Church and Brigham Young University is amazing.

There are thousands of people at these performances, and over the microphone they'll announce, "From Brigham Young University, the International Folk Dance Ensemble, sponsored by The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints." That's what they say as soon as we come on, and right away, people have questions.

Many times we stay in people's homes with host families, and the explanation of the gospel is going on all the time. People will say, "The Mormons here, I don't know very much about them. Now, why do you do this?"

Of course when we don't drink, right away all the questions are coming. You're able to share the gospel right away, because with most people, what they know about the Church is not correct. Or they don't know

anything. It's like me, I don't know a whole lot about certain religions. I know a little bit, probably just from the news, which is probably not very accurate. It's the same thing with Mormonism. I think about the interactions that the students had with people and other dancers last summer, and it's such a positive experience for the Church, it really is.

One time I was in Belgium, sitting in the audience as the students were performing, and I was overcome with the spirit radiating from the stage. I had tears running down my face, and I sat there and thought, *This is why we do this. This is why we work so hard and have little sleep and make sacrifices. It's because of performances like this.* You could feel it in the air. The dancers were radiating from the stage. It's just a moment, but it makes everything worthwhile.

It's not just our group, it's all the performing groups. It's great to have that experience as a faculty member, to sit back and think, *You know, the fruits of our efforts and the students' efforts are all worth it.*

I love to teach, and I will teach until I can't, until my legs don't work anymore. I just can't quit.

People ask, "How can you not teach dance anymore?"

I respond, "Oh, I still will, I just will in different places."